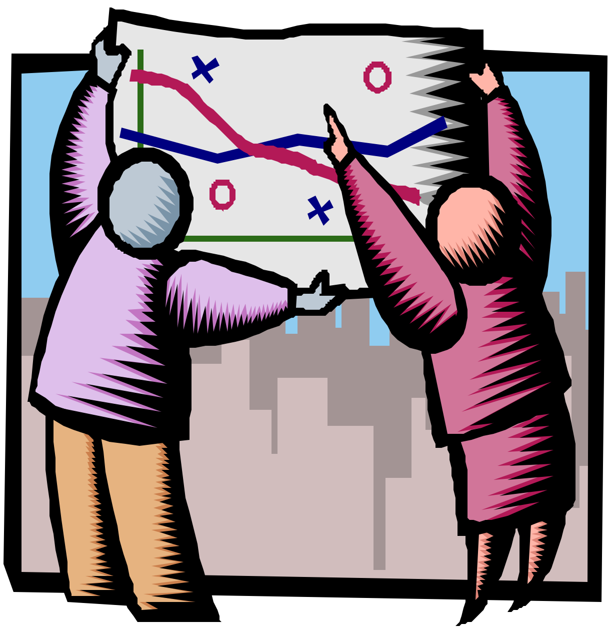
Program Monitoring and Self-Assessment: Collecting Data Using Multiple Sources

7–D



Job Performance Situation 7: Improving Program Quality Through Program Monitoring and Self-Assessment

Head Start
MOVING AHEAD
Competency-Based Training Program

Developed under delivery order number 105-97-2043, the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised in 2000 by the American Institutes for Research under contract number 105-94-2020

This material was produced in 1998, by Education Development Center, Inc., and Circle Solutions, Inc.

REFERENCE

This activity develops skill competencies in *collecting data through interviews and focus groups.* This is the second activity in the program monitoring and self-assessment skill category. Because these materials build upon those in 7–C, Leading a Program Monitoring or Self-Assessment, *we strongly suggest that the learner complete the first activity before beginning this one.*

Participants in this activity will learn how to plan for an interview and how to develop an interview protocol. They will plan a focus group and learn how to conduct and critique an interview.

Related skill activities include 3–D, Decision-Making: Building Consensus; 5–C, Conflict Resolution: Understanding the Elements; 7–C, Leading a Program Monitoring and Self-Assessment; and 7–E, Planning: Using Assessment Data

Sources. *Federal Leadership: Strengthening Head Start Through Review, Analysis, and Technical Assistance.* 1994. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *A Guide for Education Coordinators in Head Start.* 1990. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Making Health Communication Programs Work: A Planner's Guide.* April 1989. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health. Office of Cancer Communications, National Cancer Institutes. NIH Publication No. 89-1493. *Head Start Interim Monitoring Instrument for Fiscal Year 1998*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This activity was adapted from PRISM Training, 2000, Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Developed by James Bowman Associates under subcontract with the American Institutes for Research.

Collecting Data Using Multiple Sources

Outcomes. Participants who complete this activity will be able to

- describe the strengths and limitations of different data sources in conducting a program review or self-assessment
- conduct a group interview
- build rapport with the person being interviewed
- keep accurate recordings of interviews
- conduct an observation
- keep accurate records on observations
- analyze and interpret data from multiple sources

Materials. Newsprint and markers; role play cards; Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM)

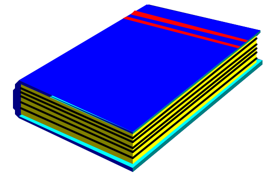
Components

This activity can be done by one person, an informal group, or a formal workshop. We have provided suggested times, but participants and facilitators may wish to adjust these to their own timetables.

Step 1. Background Reading: Using Multiple Sources of Data	10 min.
Step 2. Worksheet: Gathering Information from Multiple Sources	40 min.
Step 3. Background Reading: Conducting Individual or Group Interviews	15 min.
Step 4. Worksheet: Conducting a Family Group Interview	40 min.
Step 5. Background Reading: Obtaining Data Through Observation	15 min.
Step 6. Worksheet: Practicing Observation Skills	40 min.
Step 7. Background Reading: Analyzing Data	15 min.
Step 8: Worksheet: Practicing Analyzing Data	30 min.
Step 9: Summary	15 min.
Suggested total time	3 hrs. 40 min.

This activity contains 36 pages.

STEP 1. BACKGROUND READING: USING MULTIPLE SOURCES OF DATA



Suggested time: 10 min.

Study the following reading, Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins throughout these activities.

I. ELEMENTS

Assessment, whether a federal monitoring review or a program self-assessment, requires Head Start leaders to obtain useful, unbiased information about the Head Start program, including its strengths, problem areas as they relate to service area operations and program management, and its management abilities. In doing this, team leaders and team members use a variety of methods to learn about programs. These include group and individual interviews; observations in classrooms, family child care homes, group socialization activities, and home visits; using checklists such as a health and safety checklist and a fiscal checklist; and document reviews. Team members discuss and analyze the data gathered through these different activities to help identify the program's strengths and problem areas. This multi-pronged approach to gathering information will enable you to accomplish your task, whether you are a federal Head Start leader or a leader in a local program.

A Head Start program review is conducted in partnership with local programs every three years to ensure compliance with performance standards and other federal regulations and polices. The Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM) is both the set of instruments and the process used to conduct federal monitoring. If you are a federal team leader, your major task is to guide your team to collect information that assesses the strengths, needs and management capacity of the Head Start grantee, and enables the team to make compliance decisions on the 17 Core Questions in PRISM. A reviewer forms a picture of the strengths and needs of the grantee by observing operations, reviewing documentation, and interviewing staff, parents, grantee decision-makers, and community members. In addition, the "focus child and family" process, in which a set of children and their families are followed intensively, serves as the lens through which reviewers see how Head Start services play out for real children and families.

If you are a grantee leader, strong data gathering and analysis skills will help you collect information for your annual program self-assessment as well as help you prepare for a federal review. The skills will also help you collect information when less formal or less predictable assessment needs arise. Many program leaders also use these skills when conducting their program's community assessment.

Group and individual interviews

When you facilitate a group interview or conduct a follow-up individual interview for a federal monitoring review or program self-assessment, you are actually

- Helping to implement an assessment strategy by collecting and analyzing information
- Evaluating responses, using personal judgement and discretion to decide whether the answers that you get are pertinent or irrelevant, frank or evasive, thorough or incomplete
- Strengthening ties and building a positive relationship with program staff. Whether you are a federal or grantee leader, to get good information you must demonstrate an attitude that will put the respondents at ease and suggest that you are willing to listen and understand.

Conducting observations

There are many opportunities to be an observer during a PRISM review or a program self-assessment. PRISM reviewers who are not federal team leaders play a role as active observers and listeners during group interviews such as the Management Team Interview, Content Area Experts Interview, Staff Group Interview or Family Group Interview. Observers can notice how participants interact with one another, cue into the body language of the group, catch nonverbal signals and so forth. During PRISM reviews, all service area reviewers observe three to five focus children in their classroom or home settings. Two special PRISM tools, the *Classroom, Family Child Care or Socialization Experience Observation Instrument*, and the *Home Visit Observation Instrument* have been designed to assist during observations.

Local self-assessment participants, even if they choose a review process other than PRISM, also frequently have observation opportunities during the review process. Other frequently used observation instruments include the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), or the Early Childhood Classroom Observation tool of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

As an observer, you

- Take note of and report on what you see and hear during your observations.
- Watch and listen with an open mind, laying aside any preconceptions or biases that might limit your ability to see and hear what is actually being conveyed, rather than what you think is being conveyed;
- May need to ask follow-up questions about areas that you were unable to observe.

Using checklists

Checklists are a useful source of data when you are trying to collect detailed information on a specific area – and you don't want to forget any of the items that you need to look for. Two examples of checklists during a PRISM review are the Health and Safety Checklist that is completed by all service area reviewers and the Fiscal Checklist used by the systems reviewer who has the lead on the Core Question on fiscal management. Many programs develop their own health and safety checklist that are used not only during a self-assessment, but as part of their on-going monitoring system. They may develop checklists to guide classroom observations. Checklists are often used in conjunction with other data-gathering sources and skills. For instance, a health and safety checklist requires you to observe in classrooms and playgrounds. To complete a fiscal checklist, you may need to interview fiscal staff and to review documentation.

Reviewing documentation

Until recently, federal monitoring reviews relied heavily on written documentation. In the past, you might have heard team leaders say, "If it isn't documented, it isn't done." The PRISM review process includes a review of pertinent documents such as program plans, governing body and Policy Council minutes, and children's and families' files, with the caveat that what is seen and heard is as important as what is read. It is equally important to remember during a self-assessment process to look carefully at documentation, but also to move beyond documentation as a source of information.

II. HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW?

In making important decisions, we feel most comfortable when several different sources of data lead us to the same conclusion. A federal monitoring review or self-assessment requires that we take in an enormous amount of information through a variety of ways. No one source of data is sufficient, and all sources are necessary. Different sources of data serve as checks and balances during a review process, helping us to confirm or refute what we are learning. Each type of data has strengths and weaknesses, but together they create a much more complete and rich picture than any source of data in isolation can. This is the challenge and the strength of a multi-faceted monitoring or self-assessment process.

STEP 2. WORKSHEET: GATHERING INFORMATION FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES.

Suggested time: 40 min.

Purpose: To look at the strengths and weaknesses of gathering data in different ways during a monitoring or self-assessment process.

Part I (10 min.) Think of a time in your life when you had to make an important decision. Perhaps you were buying a new car, choosing a college, considering a job offer, or finding a child care facility. You wanted to be confident in your choice. What did you do before you decided? Another way of asking that is: What were your sources of data? What were the strengths and limitations of each source of information you used?

My decision:		
Source of data	**Strengths**	**Limitations**

Part II (20 min.)

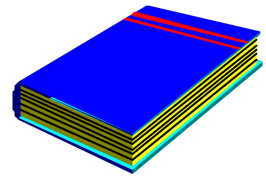
In a federal monitoring review or a self-assessment, we gather data in several different ways. Each mode of data gathering has advantages and disadvantages. All provide a piece of the information we need to help us make an informed decision. Use the chart below to think about the strengths and limitations of the data sources you would use in a federal monitoring review or might use in a program self-assessment.

Data Collection Tool or Technique	**Strengths of this source of information**	**Limitations**
Management Team Interview		
Staff Group Interview		
Review of program plans		
Interview with a member of the governing body.		
Observation of classroom or home visit		
Review of individual family files		
Observation of a Policy Council meeting		
Review of base budget narrative fiscal record		
Health and safety checklist		

Part IV (10 min.)

If you are working in pairs or a small group, discuss your answers, why you gave them, and any points of difference.

STEP 3. BACKGROUND READING: CONDUCTING INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEWS



Suggested time: 15 min.

Study the following reading. Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins throughout these activities.

Individual and group interviews are two data collection techniques that are an important part of a federal monitoring review or a self-assessment process. In the section below we will talk about

- setting up an individual or group interview
- conducting interviews, and
- group interviews.

I. SETTING UP AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP INTERVIEW

An appropriate setting sets the stage for a good interview, whether it is an individual interview or a group interview. Noise, interruptions, awkward seating arrangements, bad lighting, or an uncomfortable room temperature can all work against your interview. An appropriate setting:

- *is away from interruptions and noise.* Avoid potential sources of distractions such as children, parents, and staff walking through the area. Select a private spot away from interruptions. Put a sign on the door if necessary. Ask respondents to have phone calls held and to turn off pagers and cell phones, if they have not done this already.

- *ensures privacy and confidentiality.* Select a location that ensures privacy so the respondent will feel free to talk. If there is any likelihood that sensitive questions will be asked (or that respondents may perceive them as sensitive), it is necessary to assure a fairly private location. Assure respondents that information obtained will only be used in the context of the review process.

- *is physically comfortable.* Look for adequate lighting and good ventilation. Arrange tables and chairs so that eye contact is possible. Find a place where you can take notes comfortably. Avoid physical barriers between you and the respondent. Arrange to have some cups of water to drink.

Don't be shy about asking for another interview spot if necessary. Phrase your requests positively. Say something like, “Would someplace else be more private?” rather than “There are too many people around here.” However, if you find that an ideal setting is unavailable, you may have to proceed with the interview. Do what you can to improve the setting.

II. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

If you are conducting a federal program review, you will want to use the group interview protocols contained in the federal review instrument. If you are conducting a program self-assessment, you may want to use the protocols as written, adapt them for your program, or develop your own instrument. In either case, think of the interview as having three parts – the opening, the main body, and the close.

The Opening Statement

Develop an opening statement, and practice it so that it goes smoothly. If you deliver the statement well, you'll establish yourself at the beginning of the interview as being informed, competent, and personable. You'll have taken an important first step in building rapport with the respondent(s).

Begin By Thanking the Respondent(s) For Taking the Time to Meet With You. Review the purpose of the interview and describe how interviews such as these fit into the broader assessment plan. (For example, “This review is a program review, not an evaluation of your job function or your performance.”) Explain the methods you will use in the interview. (For example, “I'll sometimes be referring to the monitoring instrument, and I'll be taking notes from time to time.”) Assure the respondents that their answers will be handled carefully and treated with confidentiality. (“The information we are gathering will be used to develop a complete picture of the program's strengths and challenges. It won't have your name on it, so you can speak freely.”) Describe how long you expect the interview to last. You may want to do a dry run with a friend or colleague before your first interview so you can estimate the time it will take.

Offer to Answer Any Questions About the Interview Process. Even before you begin, invite the respondent(s) to raise any questions or concerns that they have about the interview. Make sure participants realize that they may ask questions at any point during the interview.

Stress the Confidential Nature of the Interview. For example, you might say, “All the information discussed will be kept confidential in the sense that no names will be connected with opinions and no family names will be shared outside the group.”

The Body of the Interview

The main part of the interview will consist of a series of questions that are carefully structured to obtain the information you need *and* build rapport with the respondent. How do you go about building this scaffold for the interview?

For a Federal Leader Conducting a Monitoring Review: The monitoring instrument serves the needs of team leaders and reviewers as well as the requirements of the review process. It enables you to systematically obtain, evaluate, condense, and analyze information about the strengths and weaknesses of service areas and systemic factors affecting program performance. The instrument contains a series of interview protocols that coincide with each of the group interviews that are part of the PRISM process.

Review the monitoring instrument carefully before conducting the interview. The documents have been carefully developed to elicit the needed information for the review. Become familiar with their structure. Although you do not need to ask questions word for word, be sure the content of each question is covered during the interview.

Use the monitoring instrument as a basis for your questioning. Use the review documents to guide and structure your inquiry. Move from the general to the more specific in developing your questions. This logical structure makes it easier for the respondent to answer. You may want to create a few of your own questions, beyond the questions in the instrument or to ask follow-up questions to clarify or elicit further information about an answer you have received.

Avoid asking a question that respondents have already answered. Because of the open-ended questions of federal monitoring instruments, participants may provide an answer to a review question along with the answer to a previous one. If a respondent has provided sufficient information about a question, it is not necessary to ask it again.

For All Head Start Leaders:[1] The following guidelines are useful for both federal and grantee leaders.

Plan your interview strategies and questions before conducting the interview. Before the scheduled interview, use the key review documents, information you have gained from prior interviews, the program's written plans, and information from other assessment team members to develop your questions and decide what areas need further exploration. You may find it helpful to develop an outline or make notes in different-colored

[1] *A Guide for Education Coordinators in Head Start.* 1990. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p. 190.

pens to structure your line of questioning and to keep you focused during the interview.

Plan to ask questions one at a time so that they can be answered one at a time. When multiple questions are asked, it is impossible to determine which question was answered. For example, asking “Was your child’s teacher well organized, open to suggestions, and a good communicator?” will cause confusion. This question can be broken down into three separate questions, if answers to all three are desired.

Plan to ask many questions that build on one another. If you don't fully understand the response, ask another question that solicits additional information. The respondent's answer may require you to ask another question on the topic to give you a broader, more in-depth understanding. It is essential to remain objective and not assume that you already know the answers to the questions.

Write out the questions, using words that the program staff understand. The respondent may not use the same terminology as you. Use clear, simple words to ensure that the respondent understands. Avoid complex sentences. Occasionally you may have to rephrase your question. For example, when interviewing a parent Policy Council member, the reviewer may ask, “Are ACF memoranda and official correspondence submitted to the Policy Council?” A more simple way of wording this question is, “Are letters and other information from the government talked about at your Policy Council meetings?”

Use very specific language.[2] When asking for an opinion, use words that convey the meaning you intend. For example, “What do you like about…?”

Use language that does not assign blame. For instance, instead of saying, “Was there anything about the teacher that you did not like?” you can ask, “What more could the teacher do to help your child?” Or, “Are there ways you would like the teacher to behave differently toward your child?”

Use language that is appropriate in terms of age, developmental background, and the language and culture of the respondent.

Make sure that the questions respect and reflect the participant’s cultural background. The definitions, concepts, and items should be relevant to their community and experience of the respondent. For example, in some cultures it is respectful to refer to all adults as “Mr.,” “Mrs.,” or “Ms.”

Use straightforward questions if you want to obtain quantitative information. “How many workshops did you attend?” steers the

[2] Ibid.

respondent to answer precisely, whereas “Did you have a chance to attend many workshops?” may lead the respondent to tell you all the reasons it was hard for her to attend.

Use open-ended questions if you’re trying to elicit qualitative information. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a yes or no. Instead of asking, “Was the Building Health workshop useful?” ask, “What did you find useful about the workshop?”

Use terms that are familiar, avoiding jargon or technical language. New parents or new staff may not be familiar with Head Start acronyms and terminology.

Avoid questions that begin with “why.” There are usually so many possible responses that the answers aren’t meaningful.

Ask questions that solicit suggestions. Questions such as “What issues would you like to discuss in the Wellness workshops next year?” give parents the opportunity to provide suggestions.

The Close

Make a closing statement at the end of the interview. Its purpose is to end the interview smoothly, not to inform the respondent about your conclusions. You should, of course, thank the respondents for their participation, adding that their cooperation has contributed to the success of the review. Whenever necessary, try to dispel any lingering doubts the respondents may have about the purpose of the review or the confidentiality of the interview information.

III. GROUP INTERVIEWS

Group interviews are a particular kind of interview: you seek to obtain the ideas of individuals but conduct the interview within a group setting. Head Start has adapted this methodology and is using it in assessments of various kinds.

The dynamics of a group interview differ somewhat from those of an individual interview or a general discussion group. The main purpose is to obtain information for the interviewer and recorder. Consensus is not the point; you are not asking the respondents to come to agreement.

Audience Segmentation

Group interviews are conducted with a group of 10 to 12 people who share something in common: role, age, gender, mission, goal, and so on. It is important to interview groups of people who are similar in an essential way: line staff from a particular program, for instance, or parents or Policy Council members. It is also a good idea sometimes to separate line staff from managers so that all respondents feel free to speak as openly as possible.

Outline and Questions

As in individual interviews, the quality of the responses depends in large part on the structure of the interview and the questions asked. When you are trying to collect information, ask straightforward, factual questions at the beginning. Open-ended questions give people a chance to consider ideas, express their opinions and encourage more discussion.

Leading Group Interviews

The person who conducts the group may or may not be the person who develops the outline and questions for the interview. For example, federal monitoring tools provide the reviewer with group interview protocols. In either case, a skilled interviewer builds rapport and trust and can probe for additional details without influencing or reacting to individual opinions. By using a structured questionnaire the interviewer can elicit responses in a standard way that is easy for the recorder to follow.

At the start of the group interview, it is important to convey some ground rules to participants:

- All information discussed during the group interview will be kept confidential. No names will be connected with comments or answers and no family names will be shared outside the group.
- Everyone is free to express his or her opinion and there are no right or wrong answers.
- The goal in including a wide range of staff and parents is to learn about the program in an integrated and holistic manner.[3]

To help participants share information freely, stress that the discussion is intended to be informal. You can use the question outline you've developed, but if respondents get off onto an interesting tangent, just let the discussion flow.

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[3] *Head Start Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring, October 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Recording Group Interviews

Have at least one recorder. While the interviewer is managing the interview, the recorder is writing down the answers. In some group interviews, two recorders are used to ensure that no information is missed and to verify the accuracy of the recordings. One way to help the recorder take notes is to use the exact questions from the questionnaire and create a document that has half a page of white space under each question. If there are eight respondents, each page can have its own question with numbers 1 through 8 down the left-hand side of the page. As the interviewer begins the session, she can assign a number to each participant, going around the table in order. That way, the recorder will know where to place that response. Assure the group that the recorder is not evaluating answers, but rather recording information so that it isn't missing or forgotten later.

STEP 4. WORKSHEET. CONDUCTING A FAMILY GROUP INTERVIEW[4]

Suggested time: 40 minutes

Purpose: To apply what you have learned in the Background Reading to obtaining information through a group interview using a protocol from the federal monitoring review instrument.

Part I (5 min.)

Consider the following program review question: *How does the grantee engage in a process of collaborative partnerships with parents?*

Your task is to find as much relevant information as you can about this question by conducting a role play of a Family Group Interview. Imagine that you are a member of a federal review team, or a program director or the member of a program self-assessment team. The Family Group Interview Protocol in the PRISM instrument is one source of data that is valuable in obtaining information that will help answer this question. Your task is to conduct, participate in, or observe a role play of a family group interview.

Part II (30 minutes)

(If you are working alone or with a partner, read the facilitator and family member role play cards, and the observer instructions and proceed to Part III.)

Recruit a facilitator to conduct the Family Group Interview. The facilitator will use the opener, two sample questions from the main body, and the closer from the Family Group Interview Protocol in PRISM. (See facilitator role play card.)

Recruit four to six volunteers to play parents, and distribute the family member role play cards to these volunteers. (See Family Member role play cards.)

Ask the rest of the group to observe and take notes about what they see during the interview. Observers should concentrate on the content of the interview, being sure to include some specific examples of what the group

[4] This activity was adapted from PRISM Training, 2000, Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services. Developed by James Bowman Associates under subcontract with the American Institutes for Research.

is saying. They should also observe the “process” of the interview, noting who talks, who doesn’t talk, watching for nonverbal cues and the like. (See Observer Instructions. These notes will be used later in the observation activity at Step 7.)

FACILITATOR ROLE PLAY CARD

Facilitator Role Play Card:
Instructions:

During this role play, you will have an opportunity to try out the techniques for structuring an interview that you read about in the background reading. The opener, main body, and closer in this role play are taken from the PRISM Family Group Interview Protocol. The **opener** tells participants about the purpose of the interview, and asks group members to introduce themselves. Your job during the opener is to make participants feel comfortable. Use the two questions in the **main body** of the interview to get the facts about recruitment and enrollment and family partnership building. Feel free to ask follow-up clarifying questions to probe for details that aren't clear, or to get additional information. You may also want to ask more open-ended follow-up questions to explore challenges, rewards and implications. End the interview with the **closer**, thanking participants and giving them a final opportunity to share their thoughts and ask questions.

Opener:
Today I would like to talk to you about your experiences with Head Start. My goal is to learn how Head Start has worked with families and children, including things that have worked well and those areas in which you would like to see some improvement. We are here to work in partnership with the grantee to help make the program the best it can be.

We know that everyone's experience with Head Start is different and we appreciate the opportunity to talk with you about your experiences. We would just like to get a good picture of what the program has been like for you and your children. Let's start with introductions. Tell us your name, your child's name and age, what center or program option your child is enrolled in, how long you've been involved in the program, and one thing that your child has learned in Head Start.

Main Body
1. Recruitment and Enrollment

Tell me how you found out about a Head Start and what it was like for you to get into Head Start.

2. Family Partnership Building

In Head Start we talk about the child and their family. Tell me about ways Head Start has been supportive of the goals you have for your family, for your child, and the goals you have for yourself.

Closer
Please share with us anything that you really like about Head Start and want to see continue, as well as anything you would like to see changed or handled differently within Head Start or your child's classroom.

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with us today.

FAMILY MEMBER ROLE PLAY CARDS

Family Member: **Peter, father**
Child: Adam, 2 years old
Receives EHS Home-based services in rural Del Oro county.

FGI Role Play Notes:

- Initially did not want home-based services because strangers would be snooping in the home
- Son has less tantrums since starting EHS
- Wants Adam to go to "school" next year (at a Center)
- His wife has made friends with other home-based parents and doesn't cry so much
- His wife tells him how the Parent Child Educator works with Adam to help him understand his strong feelings
- Hopes his wife can get a car so she can go to school "in the city"

Family Member: **Sandra, single mom**
Child: Mariah, 3-1/2 years old
Mariah is in full day Head Start and began attending EHS as a six month old infant. Mariah has Down Syndrome.

FGI Role Play Notes:

- Thinks Mariah is doing well at Head Start
- At first felt guilty about the disability. Worried that her drug use or abusive boyfriend made Mariah have Down Syndrome
- Was afraid of how Mariah looked and didn't like to hold her as an infant
- The Teacher helped a lot because Mariah was the only one that "looked that way" in the baby class
- Have learned how to care better for babies and toddlers with problems, and got lots of information on Down Syndrome. There's a support group at the hospital.
- The Parent Child Educator helped enroll Mariah in a full day classroom and encouraged me to go back to school
- Head Start has made a big difference for us - - "it's the best thing that ever happened"

Family Member: **Ernesto and Dolores, parents**
Child: Miguelito, 3 years 9 months
Miguelito attends part day at Strayhorn Center. Parents have recently settled out of the migrant stream and speak Spanish in the home.

FGI Role Play Notes

- Tried to teach Miguelito English words at home, but he usually got mad
- The older siblings have struggled in school, so they want it different for their youngest
- At first Miguelito was exposed to English at school and wouldn't speak. Now he only speaks English at home and often doesn't answer questions when they are asked in Spanish.
- Ernesto continues to do farm work, hoping to find stable job. The Family Support Specialist (FSS) asked him to call the Multi-Cultural Center for job information
- Dolores wants to learn more English and learn to use computers. Talks to FSS about goals and dreams
- Feels lucky that her son can learn English and that she can speak to some of the staff in Spanish

Family Member: **Dusty, mother**
Child: Richard, 4 years old
Richard lives with both parents and attends Head Start at the Fitzgerald Center. He received special education services through the school district from 6 months of age on. Both parents have developmental disabilities and there is an older and younger sibling in the home.

FGI Role Play Notes

- A family goal is to have special education services early for Richard, especially since she and her husband did not get early services
- Husband's mother regrets she didn't get Head Start for him when he was young
- Teacher and Family Support Specialist explain all the complicated papers about school, including IEP process and service coordination
- Want more help finding housing and jobs
- Enjoys going to parent activities at school, especially when there is a snack or something to take home. "We get to make it our program - - us families"
- Head Start is helping Richard work with his problem of pooping in his pants. They have some good ideas. Parents want to help him at home and at school.

Family Member: **Joy, single mom**
Child: Shaquira, 4 years old
Shaquira lives with her mom, a six year old, and 6 month old infant. Mom is 23 years old. She arrives late for the interview because she must pick up her children in three locations before getting them settled with a sitter for the evening.

FGI Role Play Notes

- Shaquira is learning lots. She can write her name and count.
- Working in anew job as a cashier and getting her kids to different places makes life stressful. Wishes she could attend the daytime parenting classes offered at Head Start to help her manage parenting and financial stress. Enjoyed one offered by the Mental Health Consultant during the evening.
- Her school aged child stays with a neighbor in the morning before the bus comes. Then she drives the infant across the county and then drops Shaquira on the other side of town. She is always feeling tired.
- Reports that the Family Support Specialists are really helpful for talking about problems.

Family Member: **Kathleen and Corbin, parents**
Child: Diamond, almost 5 years old
Diamond attends the Braxton Center, five and a half hours per day

FGI Role Play Notes

- Diamond likes her new school friends and talks about fun things she does
- On the forms signed at the beginning of school they were told their religious beliefs would be accepted. Waivers for immunizations were signed. A request was made by parents for a diet not containing meat or dairy products.
- They worry about the small size of their daughter. The Nutritional Consultant said she could eat non meat foods every day at Head Start.
- Diamond comes home very hungry most days. They have offered to bring in food for her, but they have been told it is against the rules.
- Dad worries that she is eating food that goes against their religion.
- Mom has visited the classroom and likes it.

OBSERVER INSTRUCTIONS

Your role is to observe and take notes during the family group interview. As you observe, listen for the facts about family partnerships. Focus also on how the group interacts during the interview.

Consider the following questions as you watch. Be prepared to discuss them with the facilitator and family members after the interview.

- Was the interview a success?
- Did the interviewer develop rapport?
- Did the group seem at ease?
- Did all of the family members contribute to the interview?
- Did the interviewer obtain as much information as possible?
- What were some follow-up questions the interviewer asked to probe for details or explore challenges, rewards and implications?
- Were there missed opportunities to gain information?
- What techniques seemed to work well?
- Which ones did not work as well?

Part III (20 minutes)

Spend some time discussing what happened and what the observers noticed during the role play. Begin your discussion with the questions on the observer instructions:

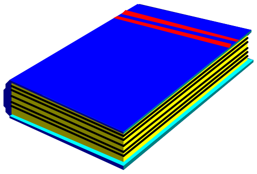
- Was the interview a success?
- Did the interviewer develop rapport?
- Did the group seem at ease?
- Did all of the family members contribute to the interview?
- Did the interviewer obtain as much information as possible?
- What were some follow-up questions the interviewer asked to probe for details or explore challenges, rewards and implications?
- Were there missed opportunities to gain information?
- What techniques seemed to work well?
- Which ones did not work as well?

Now consider the program review question you were to learn about during the interview: *How does the grantee engage in a process of collaborative partnerships with parents?*

- What facts did you learn about how the grantee engages in a process of collaborative partnerships with parents?

- What additional information would you like to have? What are some follow-up questions you might ask to obtain this information?

- What other sources of data might you want to use to get additional information to help answer the question? Who else would you want to interview? What documentation might you want to look at?



STEP 5. BACKGROUND READING: OBTAINING DATA THROUGH OBSERVATION

Suggested time: 15 min.

Study the following reading. Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins.

One of the most important ways of gathering data during a monitoring review or a program self-assessment is through observations. Some reviewers observe in classrooms, family child care homes, and group socialization activities. Others observe a Policy Council meeting or a home visit. In a federal monitoring review, some observations focus on specific children and families reviewers are "following" to learn about their experiences in Head Start.

I. BEING AN OBSERVER[5]

Observations let you see what is actually happening in a program. Doing an observation is like being a video cameraman. You want to provide a complete and accurate picture of what is happening during the observation. To do this, you provide an overall view of the setting you are observing, and then zoom in on the details of what you see and hear. Finally, you analyze what you learn through observations in conjunction with what you learn through interviews, document review and so forth to reach conclusions about the program. Some keys to conducting an observation include:

- *Know the purpose of your observation*. For instance, in a PRISM or self-assessment review, you may be observing a specific "focus child." At the same time, you want to be aware of the overall classroom environment, and look at what the teacher and other children are doing. In observing a Policy Council meeting, you want to observe the group process, listen for the content, and think of the follow-up questions you will ask members. You will want to note such details as whether parents or staff lead the meeting, if there is an agenda, which members participate, and so forth.

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[5] Adapted from Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision-Making, *Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Head Start Bureau.

- *Become familiar with the observation form you are using*. The form or format you use will guide your observations. For example, PRISM has two observation forms – one of group settings and one for use in home-based settings. Using these forms, observers record observations on eight key early childhood concepts. Program self-assessments may use other observation instruments or observation checklists. Reviewers also use observation skills in completing a health and safety checklist.

- *Be sensitive to staff nervousness*. Imagine that you are a teacher in a Head Start classroom or a Policy Council chairperson being observed during a monitoring review or self-assessment. How do you feel? Even the most confident teacher or chairperson probably experiences some butterflies in the stomach. Take the time to help the person or group being observed feel comfortable.

- *Introduce yourself quickly and explain why you are there*. Remember that the teacher or Policy Council chairperson has a job to do – working with children, or running a meeting. Arrange a time to ask follow-up questions when the staff person is free of other responsibilities.

- *Keep a low profile*. As an observer, your job is to observe – not to take part in what is going on. Dress comfortably. You may find yourself on a low chair, or sitting on the floor in a classroom. Avoid jewelry children might pull on. Find a place where you can see and hear well and move around as necessary.

- *Allow enough time*. Although reviewers often feel pressed for time it is important to allow enough time to get a complete, fair and accurate picture of what is going on. There may be key things you want to see during your observation – perhaps outdoor play or lunchtime – and it may be necessary to go back more than once.

II. RECORDING OBSERVATIONS

Recording an observation is like writing a screenplay. You want to set the stage, describe the characters, provide dialogue, and show how people are moving around in the setting. Since observation notes will help you and your team members make review or assessment decisions, it is important that they be comprehensive and clear.

- *Relieve anxiety about notetaking*. The process of recording observations can make people feel even more ill at ease. Explain that you will be taking notes during the observation. Try to relieve anxiety about this, if you sense any. Try to keep your writing from becoming distracting during the observation. If you are taking notes while observing a group interview, look up often and maintain eye contact with the group.

- *Record what you see and hear*. There are four things to think about when recording an observation. Observations should be objective, specific, accurate and complete. Give specific examples of what you see and hear. Record enough information so that it can be used effectively in the final analysis. Use actual words when possible. Feel free to use short phrases and abbreviations to make notetaking easier.

- *Observe without interpreting*. Write what you see; not what you think is happening. Describe how the teacher or child is doing or saying something. Quote the words that the Policy Council chairperson uses to open the meeting. Use words that describe but do not judge. Try to avoid labels and preconceived notions. Subjective words that do not describe actions in a factual way do not belong in observations. For instance, feelings, intelligence, or self-concept cannot be observed. Avoid words such as happy, sad, mean, kind, angry, bored, nasty, cooperative, smart, dumb, mediocre, pretty, ugly, strong, secure and insecure and the like. Likewise, reasons for doing things cannot be observed, so such words as provoked, helpful, forced to, tricked, motivated, or determined also raise red flags in observations.

- *Provide an overall picture of the setting*. Include such details as how many children there are in a classroom, or how many Policy Council members are attending the meeting. Be sure to date your observation notes and include other identifying information such as the site, name of the teacher, age of the children, or location of meeting, name of chairperson and number of members in attendance.

- *Make diagrams of the environment.* Show the setting, and where children and adults are in the room. If observing a meeting, note who is talking. Use arrows to indicate movement.

- *Write legibly*. Make sure you'll be able to read what you've written. Remember that other review team members will also need to rely on your notes. Right after an observation is a good time to reread what you've written for content and readability.

- When possible, write your observations down in "real time." Our memories are short. In writing observations after the fact you will lose a lot of the rich details and the actual words that you can capture in "real time."

STEP 6. WORKSHEET. PRACTICING OBSERVATION SKILLS

Suggested time: 40 minutes

Purpose: To give participants the opportunity to apply what they have learned about observation skills.

Part I (5 minutes) Take out a $1 bill and spend five minutes writing a description of what you see.

Part II (15 min.) What did you learn about observation skills by looking at a dollar bill? Share your $1 bill observation record with a partner and coach each other as you answer the following questions about your observation:

1. What information did you give about the "big picture" in your observation? For instance, did you give information about the shape, color and dimensions of the money?

2. How complete was your observation? For example, did you remember to write about both the front and back of the bill?

3. Did you use descriptive but non-judgmental words? For example "George Washington is wearing a jacket and has an ascot around his neck," rather than "George Washington looks bored."

4. Describe some things you learned about the dollar bill from this close look at it that you might not have noticed before.

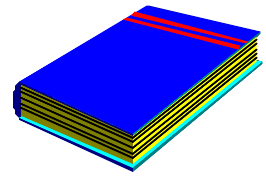
5. How might your observation have been different if you had been given a specific focus for the observation, (for example, describe the two seals on the back of the bill, or write down all of the words on the dollar bill)?

6. What did you learn about observation skills from doing this exercise?

- **Part III** (20 minutes) Ask the observers from the Family Group Interview to share the notes they took while observing the interview. Working with a partner, think about how you could apply what you learned about observing and recording to improve the interview observation notes. Consider the following questions:

    - Did the observer record what he or she saw and heard?
    - Did the observer record facts rather than interpretations?
    - Does the observation give identifying information, and an overall picture of the setting?
    - Did the observer include enough information to be effectively used in analyzing the data?
    - Did the observer provide specific details? Did her or she capture key words or phrases?
    - Is the observation accurate? Complete?

STEP 7. BACKGROUND READING. ANALYZING DATA



Suggested time: 15 min.

Study the following reading. Feel free to highlight sections or write comments in the margins.

The data collected through individual and group interviews, observations, and document review during a monitoring review or program self-assessment must ultimately be used to make decisions on how well the program is providing quality Head Start services to children and families. Members of review teams or self-assessment teams must look at the facts they have gathered during the process, and analyze the data so that they can come to conclusions about strengths and challenges the program is facing. To interpret the data gathered through multiple sources during a monitoring review or self-assessment, teams need to:

- **Begin with an open mind.** You can't make use of information if you've already made up your mind about something. Approach data analysis with an open mind and a willingness to listen and learn. Be aware of your own biases and preconceptions. Sometimes our own filters cloud our ability to see or think clearly.

- **Get the facts on the table.** Factual information is information that cannot be disputed. It is what was seen, heard or read during a review process. While facts cannot be disputed, during a review process, facts could contradict each other. For instance, classrooms at one center might be well-equipped, while another center lacks basic equipment. Resolving such inconsistencies becomes part of the data analysis process.

- **Use data from as many sources as possible.** Although anecdotal information based on one focus child, classroom observation, or family or staff interview can present a powerful story, these anecdotes may present an image that does not accurately represent the program as a whole. Make sure the data presents a complete picture of the whole program. In the PRISM process, reviewers follow a group of "focus children and families." However, in understanding what they learn by looking at this group of children, teams do not focus on individual children and families. Rather, the data they amass about the "cohort" of children and families is discussed and analyzed with the other information the team is collecting.

- **Look at the information as a whole**. Because one source of information does not give a complete picture of a program's services, it is important to look at all the data together before interpreting the data. Gathering data is like completing a jigsaw puzzle. The picture isn't complete until all of the pieces have been assembled. Seek out additional data that will provide a deeper understanding of the facts.

- **Look for patterns and trends**. Once the data is collected, the next step is to reflect on the data, and to look for patterns and trends. Do the different sources of data support or contradict one another? Do you need to gather additional information? Determine if you have enough data to enable you to begin to make inferences and draw conclusions. Integrate new information with what you already know. Look for data that will support or refute feelings, perceptions and thoughts identified as a result of data gathering activities.

- **Make inferences**. Establishing patterns and trends leads to the next step – making an inference. Inferences are more open to question than facts are. In making inferences, we hypothesize about possible cause, effect and solutions associated with our findings. For example, consider the following findings from a Head Start program's annual self-assessment:

  "There is a written policy for referral to counseling as well as documentation and follow-up referrals, but few referrals are made to community agencies."

  In moving from fact to inference, a review team might ask questions such as these:

  - What inferences can be made about the reasons that few referrals are made?
  - What inferences can be made about the impact of this fact on the quality of services to children and families?
  - How can we validate our inferences?

  Inferences should be validated through the team process. The team process helps reviewers consider whether the inferences are logical, whether there are alternative ways to view the data, and whether they are consistent with what else is known about the program.

- **Draw conclusions**. The next step in interpreting data for use in decision-making is to draw a conclusion. In a monitoring review, conclusions are reached by consensus. (See Module 3D: Decision-Making: Building Consensus for more information on the consensus process.) Conclusions are educated guesses. For this reason, they are subjective. To draw a conclusion, look for the underlying meaning of the data that you collected. Draw on knowledge and experience. The more objective the data, the more valid are the conclusions.[6] Systems thinkers suggest asking “the five whys” in arriving at the root cause of a concern in order to enable a group to recognize the systemic explanation, rather than an event-oriented or person-blaming explanation.[7]

- **Look at systems; not symptoms.** A strong review process takes a global look at a program’s systems and services, focusing on how they interrelate to support services to children and families, rather than on myriad details. A system is a collection of parts that interact with each other to function as a whole. Parts of a system are dependent upon one another to function properly. A change in one part of the system automatically affects the other parts and the system as a whole. Everything is connected to everything else. Cause and effect are often separated in time.[8] In systems thinking is that there is no simple right answer. The art of systems thinking includes learning to recognize the ramifications and tradeoffs of the action you choose.[9]

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[6] Training Guide to Observing and Recording

[7] Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, Kleiner, (1994) The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Doubleday, New York, NY, p. 110.

[8] Kaufmann, Draper L, Jr. (1980) Systems 1: An Introduction to Systems Thinking: Minneapolis, S. A. Crlton Publishers, P.1. Adapted from Mastering Change, head Start Phase III Management Insitutue, Trainer’s Manual, 1998, Developed by Circle Solutions, Inc., Vienna, VA and Education Development Center, Inc. etc.

[9] Senge et al , p. 91.

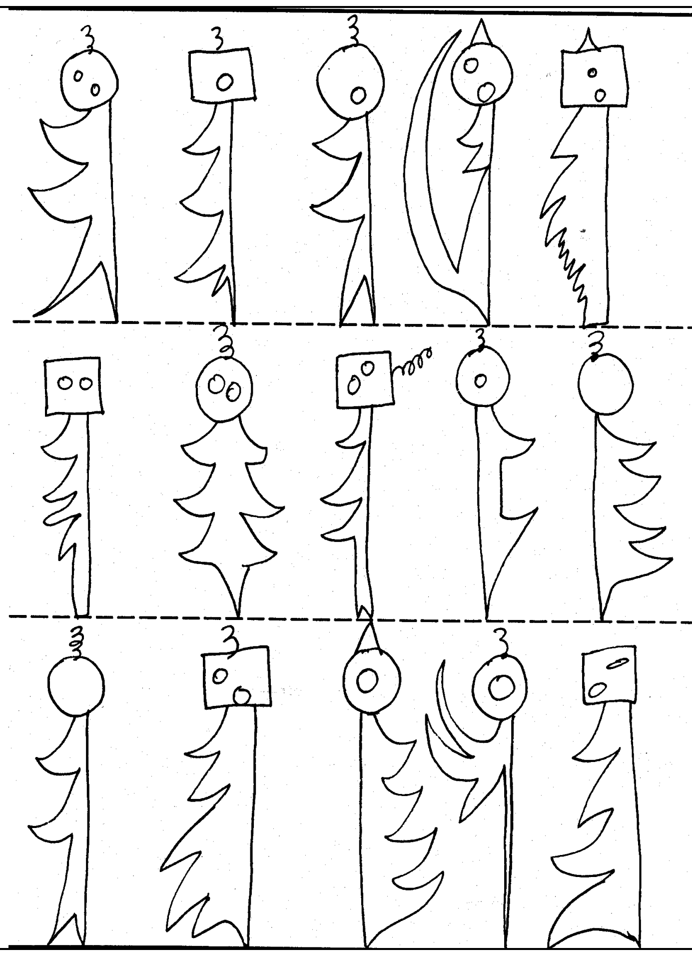
STEP 8. WORKSHEET. PRACTICING ANALYZING DATA

Suggested time: 30 min.

Purpose: To give participants the opportunity to apply what they have learned in the background reading about analyzing data.

Part I. Use your observation and data analysis skills to figure out which plants will grow on the planet Sandola.

Sandola Plants[10]

All of these plants will grow on the planet Sandola	
None of these plants will grow on Sandola.	
Which of these plants will grow on the planet Sandola?	

[10] Reprinted with permission from Diane T. Dodge, A Guide for Supervisors and Trainers on Implementing The Creative Curriculum, 3rd Ed., page 116 ©Teaching Strategies, Inc., Washington, DC, 1993.

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of plants that will grow on Sandola?

2. What are the characteristics of plants that will not grow on Sandola?

3. What patterns and trends did you find?

4. What inferences did you make?

5. What additional data gathering activities would you recommend?

6. Which of the plants in the bottom row will grow on the planet Sandola?

Stop! Do not turn the page until you have completed Part I

Sandola Plants Answer Key

The “Plants” in columns two and four will grow on Sandola because they all have the same three characteristics as all of the plants on the first line:

- something on the top of their heads
- something inside the head
- the body of the plant is facing left

Part II

Think of a time when you had to analyze data and draw conclusions based on information you had gathered, for example as a member of a monitoring or self-assessment team, or in doing a community assessment.

1. What were some of the facts you learned in your activity?
2. What kinds of trends or patterns did you find?
3. What inferences did you make?
4. Did you have a need to gather more information? If so, what kind of additional information did you need?
5. How did your additional information change your inferences?
6. What conclusion did you reach?

Part III

If you are working in pairs or a small group, discuss your answers, why you gave them, and any points of difference.

STEP 9: SUMMARY

Suggested time: 15 min.

Key Points

- The value of various data sources to learn about programs
- The strengths and limitations of using multiple sources of data used in monitoring and self-assessment
- Tips for conducting individual and group interviews
- Tips for conducting and recording observations
- Information on analyzing data in order to draw conclusions

Personal Review

What did you learn from this activity?

1.____
____
____
____

2.____
____
____
____

3.____
____
____
____

How will you use your new knowledge and skills in your work?

1.____
____
____
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2.____
____
____
____

3.____

What else do you think you might need to learn in order to master the skill of collecting data using multiple sources of information?

1.

2.

3.